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ABSTRACT

To maintain a good school system, a school board should expect from its administrators certain attitudes and behaviors: first, administrators should consider the students' interests above all else, support board decisions once made, consider ethical issues, be optimistic, and take pride in their jobs and their school district; second, they should keep the board well-informed, know the division of responsibilities in their district, make decisions and discharge their duties using common sense, involve affected persons in decision-making, and take responsibility for their own professional growth. These expectations, however, should be mutual--the board is similarly responsible to its administrators. (MCG)

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Remarks by

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WHAT A BOARD SHOULD EXPECT FROM ITS PROFESSIONAL STAFF

"Good clear information, for starters -- and here's how to get both and more."

CLINIC D-62

Annual Convention Clinic Session
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WHAT A BOARD SHOULD EXPECT FROM ITS PROFESSIONAL STAFF

CLINIC D-62

Richard P. Koeppe, Ph.D.

It is an honor to have been asked to serve as the Superintendent representative on a program to discuss the topic "What a Board should expect from its professional staff." I obviously cannot speak for all Superintendents, but I know from conversations with many of my peers that I do speak for a large number of them.

In addressing this topic, I have chosen to limit my comments to the professional administrative staff. I recognize, however, that much of what I suggest a Board should expect from its professional administrative staff could also be expected of its professional teaching staff. I limited my expectations to the administrative staff because I believe the Board can and should expect the most from its administrators. The Board, for this group, should have its highest expectations.

I would like to suggest that expectations come in two major categories. There are certain attitudes a Board should expect its administrators to possess. There are also certain behaviors a Board should expect its administrators to exhibit. For the sake of balance, I will suggest five attitudes and five behaviors a Board should expect from its professional administrative staff. The list of attitudes and behaviors is not necessarily in rank order nor all inclusive. They are to me, however, attitudes and behaviors that make for a "Good School System."

ATTITUDES TO EXPECT:

THE BOARD SHOULD EXPECT ITS PROFESSIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF. . .

"To Keep Students the Center of the Decision-Making Process." A popular term of the day is "child advocate." Administrators should be first among those who claim this title. They should be able to defend any recommendation made to the Board on this basis. The schools are after all primarily, if not exclusively, there to serve the needs of its students.

"To be Supportive of Board Decisions Once They are Made." Perhaps another word for supportive is loyalty. I refer here not to blind support or blind loyalty. I do, however, refer to major decisions a Board by law must make and for which they are known to be accountable. It is important for administrators to be able to say, "I wish the Board had done X rather than Y. I know the reasons they selected Y rather than X. They showed good judgment in that. I do support the decision now that it's made."

"To Have Thought Through What They Consider to be Good, Right, and Just." An administrative staff is, of course, made up of individuals each with his or her own experiences and value system. Through working together over time on important questions, there should emerge a consensus of what the administrative staff defines as good, right, and just and for whom. The administrative staff, although the group most directly involved with the workings of the Board, serves many masters. They should know what is good, right, and just for students, teachers, and parents, who are their primary constituents.

"To Believe That People are Basically Good and can be Trusted -- That Life is Worth Living." I believe a Board should expect the professional administrative staff to be basically optimists, to look on the brighter side of events. This is not to suggest a "Pollyanna," nothing is ever wrong, you can always trust everyone attitude. It does, however, suggest a positive faith that things will work out because people usually want them to.

"To Take Pride in Their Jobs and in the School District." The professional administrative staff should be proud of what they do. They should not say, "I am just a principal." They should say, "I am a principal in School District X. It is a great job and a great place to work." If it isn't either, the person should do something about it. With pride also comes confidence.

The abovementioned attitudes are ones I try to keep alive and well within me. The Board for whom I work tells me in a variety of ways that these are attitudes they expect of me. These are attitudes I look for when I have the opportunity to add someone to the administrative team.

At this point, I would like to comment on the behaviors a Board should expect from its professional administrative staff. It has been my observation that if one can employ administrators with the abovementioned attitudes certain behaviors in fact do follow.

BEHAVIORS TO EXPECT:

THE BOARD SHOULD EXPECT ITS PROFESSIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF. . .

"To Provide the Board with Clear, Complete, and Timely Information." A Board cannot function as it needs to without clear, complete, and timely information. The majority of information it needs must come from and through its professional administrative staff. It is important the Board and the Superintendent on behalf of the administrative staff come to some agreement on what is meant by "clear, complete, and timely information." A large quantity of information is often not as crucial as a high level quality of information. Clear means easily understandable. Complete means thorough, all-inclusive, and honest. Timely means just that -- timely.

"To Know What Decisions They can Make and for Which They Will be Held Accountable." It is important for a Board and its professional administrative staff led by the Superintendent to come to some agreement as to what decisions are made where and by whom. This will, of course, vary between and among Districts for a variety of reasons. Who is expected to decide which teacher to hire or what instructional materials to purchase or which administrator to hire, transfer, or promote or where to build the next school and how large it should be or which school to close or when to suspend a student or how to organize the teaching staff to best deliver the instructional program, and on and on.

Board members and members of the professional administrative staff alike should be able to say, "I know who is expected to make that particular decision."

"To Use Reasonable and Professional Judgment -- Common Sense -- in Making Decisions and Carrying out Their Duties." Many of the decisions that the professional administrative staff must make are spelled out in State Law, Board Policy, and Administrative Procedures. No matter how explicit and detailed these may be, they still require interpretation and application to unique situations. To do the interpretation and application requires judgment that can be defended as having been reasonable, professional, and -- yes -- shows common sense.

"To Involve Persons in the Decision-Making Process who are Affected by the Decisions They Make." The Board should expect an affirmative answer when it asks members of its professional administrative staff, "Did you involve (speak with, share information with, get information from, listen to) people affected by that decision you made?" The answer can, of course, be tempered by the nature of the decision, the time available to make it, the size of the organization in which it is made,

and a variety of other factors. The Board should expect its professional administrative staff to do things with people as much as possible rather than to do things for or to people.

"To Continue to Grow Professionally With Little External Motivation." The professional administrative staff should be expected to keep up with and -- yes -- even ahead of the times. They should see this as part of their responsibility as leaders in the District. They should be the best of models for all other employee groups. The Board should expect to get answers when they ask, "What's happening in computer education, provisions for the gifted and talented, global awareness, technical education?" and on and on. The Board should expect to get an answer when it asks, "What are you working on to improve yourself as a professional administrator?"

A CLOSING:

THE BOARD SHOULD EXPECT MUCH FROM ITS PROFESSIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF is the gist of what I have suggested. But as is often the case, there is a catch -- and this is the flip side of the topic under consideration, namely "What a professional staff should expect from its Board."

TURNABOUT IS FAIR PLAY. I would further like to suggest that the expectation one has of the other can and should be mutual. An administrative staff should expect its Board to . . .

- keep students the center of the decision-making process;
- be supportive of administrative decisions once they are made;
- have thought through what they consider to be good, right, and just;
- believe that people are basically good and can be trusted; and
- take pride in being Board members and in the District.

An administrative staff should expect its Board to . . .

- provide the staff with clear, complete and timely information it possesses;
- know what decisions it has delegated to whom and why;
- use reasonable judgment and common sense in making its decisions and carrying out its duties;

- involve persons affected by decisions it makes; and
- be willing to constantly grow on the job -- to learn.

It would be my guess that any school district that had a Board of Education and professional administrative staff that had such expectations of each other as mentioned above would either be or have the makings to become -- a Great School District.

What I have described is attainable. What I have described is a never-ending effort on the part of the Board and its professional staff.

In a fit of vanity, let me close by saying that it sounds something like the District in which I am fortunate to be Superintendent.